Pam.
Egypt
Ross H.H.
Nat. Review
Sept. 1924
154

"EGYPT FOR THE EGYPTIANS"

In Egypt the stage is set, the curtain has rung up on the first act of the drama of Independence—a comedy if you take into consideration the various elements in the situation. There are the King and his Parliament, it is true, and all the paraphernalia of constitutional government; but there is also the British Residency—blandly detached, though the actual seat of authority; and the Headquarters of the British Army in Cairo, with a garrison far exceeding pre-Independence days. There is the diplomatic coterie, *comme il faut*, as in other sovereign States; but not a question of *haute politique* can be negotiated between the Powers they represent and the Government of King Fuad without reference to the British High Commissioner and through him to the Foreign Office at home. There is the expulsion of the British officials from the various Government Departments and their replacement by Egyptian ministers; but there is also the consequent deterioration that has set in in the administration of those Departments, and that threatens in time to undo all the constructive work of the Occupation.

Already many even of the most ardent supporters of the Declaration of February 28, 1922, whereby independence was conferred upon Egypt, are asking themselves whether some measure of autonomy consistent with the actual realities of the situation and the continued progress and prosperity of the Egyptian people would not have been wiser, fairer in the long run, than this counterfeit supremacy, with its equivocal privileges and arrogant assumptions. Such a system of self-government, for example, as was outlined in the Report of the Milner Commission of 1921, by which the management of their internal affairs was left largely to the Egyptians themselves, while it amply guaranteed the abiding relations between the two countries; or the later Curzon Note, maintaining the Protectorate which had been set up in Egypt after the Declaration of War in 1914. But the lukewarm attitude of our statesmen at that time, the abortive negotiations that followed both measures, and the outburst of insurrection with which they were received in Egypt necessitated the temporary shelving of the question. The Egyptian Cabinet resigned. Zaghloul, who had been permitted to return in 1921, was again exiled, and for several months Egypt was administered under Royal Decree and Martial Law.

During this period *pourparlers* were taking place between Lord Allenby, who had succeeded Sir Reginald Wingate as High Commissioner in 1919, and a group of Egyptian politicians (of Turkish nationality) which led ultimately to the Declaration of Independence of February 28, 1922. By the provisions of this later measure Great Britain not only retired altogether from the standpoint of the Curzon Note, but elevated Egypt in a single breath to its present hectic and artificial status. To say that such a step was consistent with our avowed policy since 1882 is gravely to misapprehend the situation. No doubt the exigencies of the times and our past pledges called for some reconstruction of the relations between the two countries, but the peculiar difficulties attending the problem of self-determination in Egypt—the nature of her people, the dangerous stage of development at which they had arrived, and their historical past—demanded above all that the readjustment should be gradual. The sudden metamorphosis from the subjection of two thousand years to complete sovereignty and Constitutional Government that has lately been effected in the country has already proved perilous not only to the newly enfranchised State, but to the co-existence of British interests and authority.

It is common knowledge that Mr. Lloyd George's Cabinet was literally forced into acceptance of the Declaration of 1922 against their better judgment, and the wisdom of their first impressions is exemplified in the fact that British prestige has been steadily declining in Egypt ever since its promulgation. There is nothing the Egyptian scorns so much in his heart as weakness or yielding of any sort; there is nothing he so thoroughly understands or appreciates as the "strong hand." A demonstration of strength at the time of the 1919 riots, when the promised abolition of Martial Law was postponed, or again in the crisis that necessitated Zaghloul's second banishment in 1921, might have saved both countries from the present impasse. But instead we had an exhibition of vacillation, the policy of alternating leniency and sternness that culminated in the illogical and unnecessary surrender of 1922.

The Egyptian people are prone to short views, and, dazzled by the gilded nature of the sop extended to them, seized eagerly upon it, trusting to time and their adored leader, Saad Pasha Zaghloul, to accomplish the "complete independence" still withheld. Zaghloul too was dazzled. The prospect opened up to his personal ambition was one to tempt many a stronger man. From the exiled demagogue

agitator he saw himself on the pinnacle to which he has now attained as Premier of the first Parliament of an independent Egypt. But even in his few short months of office he must have realized the anomaly and complexities of his position. The wave of popularity that brought him into power is already on the wane. Outside the pale of politics it is easy enough for any man to make promises, but to fulfil them in the restricted area of statesmanship is quite another matter. Though practically without an Opposition in Parliament, he is faced with that far more dangerous factor—a growing body of opposition in the country—his own followers, with the gospel he himself has preached for so many years upon their lips, and a passion of extremism in their hearts that may quite conceivably lead to riots, looting, and even bloodshed. "Ill deeds come home to roost," and though Zaghloul may not have been directly responsible for the tragic occurrences of 1919 and 1921 and the series of outrages on British officials that culminated in the conspiracy trial of last year, there is no doubt that his doctrines incited them. If you begin with murder you generally end with murder; such is the inexorable law of destiny.

As regards the future, what neither the Wafd leader nor his supporters seem to realize is that politically the Egyptian question no longer exists outside Egypt. So far as the Home Government is concerned it was settled finally and irrevocably in February 1922. The Declaration of that date was a unilateral decree conferring independence upon Egypt—not a measure put forward for the consideration of the Egyptian people, and their very assumption of royal prerogatives, the election and functioning of their first Parliament, are confirmation of the new order. There remain but the four reserved points still at issue between the two Governments, i.e.—

(i) Security of communications of the British Empire in Egypt.
(ii) Defence of Egypt against all foreign aggression, direct or indirect.
(iii) The protection of foreign interests and of minorities.
(iv) The Sudan.

But these can only be negotiated on the basis of the 1922 Agreement. Although, to placate his followers, Zaghloul is compelled to adhere to his former protestations that only on the condition of "complete independence" will he treat with Great Britain, in his heart he must realize the futility of his claim.

Sooner or later the delimitations contained in the Four Points will have to be faced. They are the touchstone by which is revealed the hollowness and unreality of the papier-mâché kingdom we have created on the Nile banks and that exists only by virtue of British machine-guns. For purposes of defence and the protection of our own vital interests in the "strip of market garden" that lies on the high road to our Far Eastern possessions the military occupation of Egypt is a continued necessity both for us and for the Egyptian people.

Whether they will be able, peacefully, to reconcile such a state of affairs with the precocious political theorems they have lately evolved remains to be seen. Zaghloul, of course, in his own interests will postpone the negotiations as long as possible; but the day of reckoning must inevitably come, and with it the great and final test of his own personality and powers of leadership. If, in that crisis, he is able to steer the ship of State between the Scylla of extremism on the one hand, and the rock of Great Britain's unalterable determination in the matter of the Sudan and the integrity of her own interests in Egypt on the other, he will have proved himself a statesman of the highest order. But Zaghloul is an old man, and the retributive consequences of his violent and seditious past are bound to tell heavily against him in the struggle. Politically, "Young Egypt" is aflame, and the premature and ill-advised concessions of February 1922 have only served to whet their heady and ill-balanced aspirations.

But what is really of more serious import as regards the future is the economic and administrative chaos threatening the country as a result of the wholesale expulsion of British officials from the Government Departments. Under the Indemnity Act the entire British Staff—with the exception of the Financial and Judicial Advisers—will have disappeared by 1927, leaving the work of the Departments in the hands of Egyptian office-seekers who possess neither the technical knowledge, administrative capacity, nor sense of rectitude and justice to maintain them at their present high standards. Already nepotism, bribery, corruption—all the abuses common to oriental administration—are making themselves felt, and these retrograde tendencies are bound in time to undo the progress that has been so toilfully and perseveringly achieved during the forty years of British occupation.

We have relinquished our responsibilities, too, at a most critical and dangerous moment for the newly enfranchised State. Aggressive action by the lower and more ignorant

classes is common to all countries at the present juncture. Egypt is peculiarly ripe for such manifestations. Her newly awakened political sense has obsessed all her faculties. Schoolboys and students who should be concerned only with their studies devote their time to precocious political intrigue and propaganda. The discipline in the schools has been steadily deteriorating ever since Lord Kitchener's day, and now a smattering of accomplishments, without any attempt at character-building, is the most the educational system can boast. Moral training of any sort is shunned as likely to upset religious susceptibilities; indeed, the moral standards of the young Egyptian are formed long before he enters the school curriculum. The hareems of Egypt are cradles of intrigue and corruption of every sort, and in them he imbibes his first lessons in ethical principles. In the great towns the lower classes are sunk in misery and destitution, and are nobody's care. The Fellaheen alone are prosperous, thanks to the benefits conferred on them under British rule. But already there are signs of a break-up of these fortunate conditions. With the removal of the English from the various Government Departments the guarantee of their water-supply—the vital necessity of agricultural life in Egypt—and the sure tenure of their land are again jeopardized. The Pashas and wealthy land-owners care nothing for the welfare of the people where a few extra pounds can be extorted; and in place of the impartial British inspectors in the provinces to whom the fellah could formerly go with his grievance, he now has to deal with sycophantic Egyptian officials, each with his own axe to grind. Here is a fruitful soil for the revolutionary seed of the Communist agitator.

The only factor that can be relied upon in the event of a possible rising is the presence of British troops in the country. But it must be remembered that under the new régime—so far at least as civil disturbances are concerned—the co-operation of the army would be by no means an easy or straightforward matter. Things were difficult enough in the era of Martial Law, and much harm was done, for example, in the Alexandria riots of May 1921 before the troops were called in and took over the town. To-day the situation would be ten times more delicate. There is always the contingency, too—a remote one, we hope—of the removal of the British garrison to the Canal banks. It does not take an expert in military strategy to realize that Egypt can only be held from Cairo. Not only does the capital supply the whole of the water for the Canal

area, but now that the railways have passed into Egyptian management the lines of communication of the army could easily be tampered with or even cut.

This question of the railways is intimately bound up with the future of Egypt. It affects not only the military and political situation, but the lives and safety of the whole population, and the travelling public have good reason to be concerned at the recent transference of authority. For upwards of thirty years, ever since their inception by England, the railways have been under British control, and perhaps of all Departments in the Government have ranked the highest as a model of efficiency. There is a special irony in the handing over of this perfected system to a body of men who possess neither the engineering skill nor organizing capacity to maintain it at its present high standard. The resignation of two successive British general managers within three months, more particularly of Brigadier-General R. D. B. Blakeney, C.M.G., D.S.O., under whose able direction the railways have been brought to their present state of efficiency, is an ominous sign that there is something wrong with the new administration. Personal panegyrics are out of place in a political article, but all who know General Blakeney realize that defence of principle alone would have induced a man of his strength of character and tried experience to resign a post of such importance until actually compelled to do so, and it is only another proof of the obtuseness and self-sufficiency of the Egyptian people that they could willingly have suffered such a valuable coadjutor to depart. But for him, the best or nothing. He made his stand, and as there were none to back him, threw in his hand. Henceforward progressive deterioration is the prospect with which we are faced on the Egyptian State Railways, with consequences that may have a serious repercussion on the political situation. One of the conditions to which Great Britain is pledged under the new agreement is the protection of the lives and interests of foreign nationals, and any disaster to them, attributable to failure of railway communication, might well be imputed to Imperial responsibility by the prejudiced and jealously watchful representatives of other Powers.

Apart altogether from the problem of "Egypt for the Egyptians"—though inextricably bound up with it—is this question of the vast mixed population in the country—French, Italian, German, Greek, Russian, Levantine, Jew—who during the years of British occupation have built up within the sheltering wall of their capitulations immense

commercial interests involving a large percentage of the total capital of the country. But capitulations are only a lego-diplomatic instrument at best, and what really stands between them and destruction is the strong arm of British soldiery. Any failure on our part to redeem our pledge with regard to their protection must inevitably lead to international complications which would not only put an end to Egyptian liberties for many a day, but might prove a serious menace to our most vital link with the Far East. If not England—then some other; and there are plenty of aspirants only too ready and anxious to step into our shoes. Anti-British propaganda is by no means confined to Egyptian sources in this country; the greater part of it, in fact, can be traced to European agencies, and this circumstance tends to complicate the situation at every turn. Nor can the common menace of Bolshevism be ignored. Were the all-powerful Wafd, for example, to fall into the hands of Moscow—which is avowedly out for the dissolution of the British Empire—a very serious state of affairs might be produced. England cannot afford to have a hostile power under the influence of the Soviets on the flank of the Canal, and for this reason, if for no other, the relation between the two countries must remain to the end of the chapter protector and protected. The whole problem is *ipso facto* a military one, mask it as you will. Egypt's geographical position has rendered her for centuries the prey of marauding powers. For the first time in her history she has a bulwark against foreign aggression, and one, too, that costs her nothing. The situation is indeed, in this respect, of the most happy mutuality; could the Egyptian people but see it in its true light. For England—a corridor to the East. For Egypt—safety and freedom to develop her manifold resources under the beneficent shadow of the greatest Empire the world has ever known. Beneficent truly, for what other Power of England's strength and with her opportunities would have hesitated at annexation? What other Power in the future, should Great Britain ever be rash enough to renounce her military responsibilities in the Nile Valley, would so hesitate?

H. H. Ross

THE MYSTERY OF SIR E. B. GODFREY

Few historical events have had such tragic consequences as the death of Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, in October 1678. By it life was given to Titus Oates's moribund Popish Plot and the greatest villain and perjurer in history exalted to the position of the "Saviour of the Nation." As one result only of Godfrey's death, twenty-eight priests and laymen and one peer were executed and at least five others died in prison.

Naturally, the case of Godfrey has attracted the attention of all historians, and has proved a fascinating study for criminologists. Even in recent years a controversy has raged over the question whether Godfrey committed suicide or was murdered. The latest writers to inquire into the subject, the late Mr. Andrew Lang and Sir John Hall, have come to no conclusion, and the latest historian of the reign of Charles II, Sir Richard Lodge, has summed up the whole controversy by saying that, "in spite of the ingenuity displayed, the death of Godfrey still remains an unsolved, and probably an insoluble, mystery."

Three poor men—Green, Berry and Hill—were executed in 1679 for Godfrey's murder, upon evidence universally admitted to have been false. The theory then put forward was that Godfrey was murdered by Jesuit agents at Somerset House. There has never been produced a scrap of evidence, circumstantial or otherwise, in support of this utterly ridiculous belief, and it is possible to disprove word for word every statement made in its favour. On the other hand, Catholics at that time put forward the theory that Godfrey had committed suicide. Two barristers, Farwell and Paine, after a fair trial, were justly punished, in 1682, for making untruthful assertions in support of this view. Nevertheless, about the year 1688, Roger L'Estrange, the Court pamphleteer, attempted to rehabilitate the hypothesis, with the aid of much bad evidence, and this hypothesis still finds its strongest supporters among Catholics at the present day. It is equally untenable. There remains, therefore, only the hypothesis that there was a murder by some private person. Who killed Sir E. B. Godfrey? I shall attempt to answer this question, and in doing this it will be necessary to give a sufficient reason in reply to the further question of why the murderer's name has never once been mentioned up to the present day.